

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Original) A method comprising:  
inserting a vector in a packet that identifies a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices that delivers the packet to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
inserting a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with an exception.
3. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
using the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.
4. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the vector includes a bit identifying the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.
5. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
removing the vector from the packet for delivering the packet to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.
6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the packet is delivered over a transmission line in an aggregate of transmission lines to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the vector includes bits respectively identifying the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

8. (Currently Amended) A computer program product, tangibly embodied ~~in an information carrier~~ on a computer-readable medium, the computer program product being operable to cause a machine to:

insert a vector in a packet that identifies a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices that delivers the packet to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

9. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 being further operable to cause a machine to:

insert a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with an exception.

10. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 being further operable to cause a machine to:

use the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

11. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 wherein the vector includes a bit identifying the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

12. (Original) A computer program product of claim 8 being further operable to cause a machine to:

remove the vector from the packet for delivering the packet to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

13. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 wherein the packet is delivered over a transmission line in an aggregate of transmission lines to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

14. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 wherein the vector includes bits respectively identifying the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

15. (Currently Amended) A packet forwarder comprises:  
a process stored on a computer to insert a vector in a packet that identifies a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices that delivers the packet to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

16. (Currently Amended) The packet forwarder of claim 15 further comprising:  
a process stored on a computer to insert a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with an exception.

17. (Currently Amended) The packet forwarder of claim 15 further comprising:  
a process stored on a computer to use the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

18. (Original) A system comprising:  
a switch device capable of,  
inserting a vector in a packet that identifies a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices that delivers the packet to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

19. (Original) The system of claim 18 wherein the switch device is further capable of:  
inserting a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with an exception.

20. (Original) The system of claim 18 wherein the switch device is further capable of:  
using the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device  
in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

21. (Original) A packet forwarding device comprising:  
an input port for receiving a packet;  
an output port for delivering the received packet; and  
a switch device capable of,  
inserting a vector in a packet that identifies a first device in a stack of packet forwarding  
devices that delivers the packet to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding  
devices in the stack.

22. (Original) The packet forwarding device of claim 21 wherein the switch device is  
further capable of:  
inserting a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with an exception.

23. (Original) The packet forwarding device of claim 21 wherein the switch device is  
further capable of:  
using the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device  
in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

24. (Original) A router comprising:  
a switch device capable of inserting a device vector in a packet that identifies a first  
device in a stack of packet forwarding devices that delivers the packet to an exception handler  
being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

25. (Original) The router of claim 24 wherein the switch device is further capable of inserting an exception flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with an exception.

26. (Original) The network switch of claim 24 wherein the switch device is further capable of using the device vector and an exception routing table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.